

# CUBA BIRD SURVEY

**Cuba's Wild Western Peninsula, Western Mountains,  
Zapata Swamp, and Colonial Havana - November 6 – 14, 2016**

with **Birds of Cayo Coco optional extension - November 15 – 17, 2016**

## EXCLUSIVE ITINERARY, RICH IN NATURE AND CULTURE

The Caribbean Conservation Trust, Inc. (CCT) is promoting an exclusive, U.S. led and managed birding program to Cuba! The program is coordinated under U.S. government authorization by CCT, which is based in Connecticut. CCT staff have a **20 year history** of managing bird conservation programs in Cuba. Along with **CCT Ornithologist Michael Good**, and **Dr. Luis Diaz, Curator, National Museum of Natural History, Havana**), our team includes a bilingual Cuban tour guide, and 3 additional regionally located Cuban naturalists. They will guide you through a variety of natural areas in Cuba, the Caribbean's largest, most ecologically diverse island nation.

CCT designed this itinerary to take you to Cuba's finest bird habitats, most beautiful national parks, diverse biosphere reserves, and unique natural areas. We will interact with local scientists and naturalists who work in research and conservation. In addition to birding, we will learn about the ecology and history of regions we visit. Finally, and especially given the ongoing changes in U.S. – Cuban relations, we can expect some degree of inquiry into fascinating aspects of Cuban culture, history, and daily living during our visit.

### Cuba's Birds

According to BirdLife International, which has designated 28 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Cuba, "Over 370 bird species have been recorded in Cuba, including 27 which are endemic to the island and 29 considered globally threatened. Due to its large land area and geographical position within the Caribbean, Cuba represents one of the most important countries for Neotropical migratory birds – both birds passing through on their way south (75 species) and those spending the winter on the island (86 species)."

Our itinerary provides opportunities to see many of Cuba's endemic species and subspecies, as listed below. This trip will also focus on the many neotropical migrant species that migrate south to Cuba in the fall (endemic species and endemic subspecies in italics):

*Bare-legged Owl, Cuban Oriole, Bee Hummingbird, Blue-headed Quail-Dove, Gray-fronted Quail-Dove, Cuban Black Hawk, Cuban Blackbird, Cuban Bullfinch, Cuban Gnatcatcher, Cuban Grassquit, Cuban Green Woodpecker, Cuban Parakeet, Cuban Parrot, Cuban Pewee, Cuban Pygmy-Owl, Cuban Solitaire, Cuban Tody, Cuban Trogon, Cuban Vireo, Fernandina's Flicker, Giant Kingbird, Gundlach's Hawk, Eastern Meadowlark, Cuban Nightjar, Red-shouldered Blackbird, Tawny-shouldered Blackbird, Oriente Warbler, Yellow-headed Warbler, Zapata Wren, Zapata Sparrow, Cuban Crow, Cuban Emerald, Bahama Mockingbird, Thick-billed Vireo, & Western Spindalis.*



Cuban Gnatcatcher

Cuban Oriole

Smooth-billed Ani

Cuban Tody

Red-legged Thrush

Other species of interest include:

Great Lizard-Cuckoo, La Sagra's Flycatcher, Loggerhead Kingbird, *Olive-capped Warbler*, Key West Quail-Dove, Ruddy Quail-Dove, Zenaida Dove, *Stygian Owl*, West Indian Whistling Duck, American Flamingo, Wood Stork, Roseate Spoonbill, and a great variety of wading birds, and numerous other migratory and resident species.

## WHERE WE TRAVEL

Our **Cuba Bird Survey** begins and ends in Havana, with an evening in a comfortable hotel in a quiet residential part of the city. We return to Havana at the end of the birding program, spending an afternoon and evening as described below.

The **Guanahacabibes Peninsula**, located at the far western tip of the island, is one of the last remaining wild places in the Caribbean. A major migratory corridor, this peninsula lies parallel to the Yucatan Peninsula in eastern Mexico, and adjacent to the Palancar Reef, the largest contiguous coral reef in the northern hemisphere, second in size only to the Great Barrier Reef. The peninsula is also home to a number of important aboriginal archaeological sites. The peninsula was Cuba's first significant protected area following the triumph of the revolution in 1959, and in 1987 declared a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO. The *Bee Hummingbird*, *Cuban Crow*, *Cuban Parrot*, as well as numerous other birds are quite likely here (2 nights).



Blue-headed Quail Dove

**Cuba's Western Mountains** include two of the country's most diverse and dramatic ranges: the Sierra de la Rosario, and Sierra de los Organos. We will explore an area common to both ranges in search of western range endemic species such as the *Cuban Solitaire*. A highlight of the trip, we will visit the magical, unusually beautiful karstic landscape of mogotes-- the towering, lushly vegetated, flat-top limestone monoliths that dominate the Organos Mountains. This is the only region in which we will likely see the *Cuban Solitaire*, *Cuban Grassquit*, *Giant Kingbird*, & *Olive-capped Warbler*. Other potential endemic species for western Cuba include *Cuban Oriole*, *Cuban Green Woodpecker*, *Cuban Pewee*, *Cuban Pygmy-Owl*, *Cuban Tody*, *Cuban Trogon*, *Cuban Vireo*, & *Yellow-headed Warbler*.

We will also explore the diverse wetland region of the **Zapata Peninsula**, Cuba's richest and most important birding destination located in the historic **Bay of Pigs**. This peninsula is a Ramsar Convention (international conservation treaty) designated site, and is among the most important wetlands in the West Indies. Here, the best local guides will lead us through protected areas in Cienaga de Zapata National Park and other natural sites off the beaten track. The Zapata Peninsula covers more than 2800 square miles and features easily accessible, everglades-like ecology and habitat. Framed by the pristine Caribbean coastal environment of the Bay of Pigs, the peninsula features vast open swamp land, low coastal forests, sparkling white sand beaches, healthy and accessible coral reefs, and refreshing natural limestone pools called cenotes. *Bee Hummingbird*, *Cuban Black Hawk*, *Zapata Wren*, *Zapata Sparrow*, *Fernandina's Flicker*, *Bare-legged Owl*, *Tawny-shouldered* and *Blue-headed* and *Grey-fronted Quail Doves*, *Red-shouldered Blackbird* are among the many birds we will hope to find (3 nights).



**OPTIONAL 3 DAY/NIGHT EXTENSION to Cayo Coco and Cuba's Atlantic Archipelago** provides excellent birding opportunities on Cuba's Atlantic coast. These previously uninhabited and relatively unexplored islands were connected to the mainland by an 18+ mile causeway completed in 1989. Cuba's academy of sciences (CITMA) maintains a research facility here. **These barrier islands and keys provide unique opportunities for:** *Cuban Gnatcatcher*, *Oriente Warbler*, *Thick-billed Vireo*, *Bahama Mockingbird*, *West Indian Whistling Duck*, as well as numerous shorebirds and aquatic birds. This region also provides additional opportunities to see rare endemics such as *Zapata Sparrow* & *Gundlach's Hawk*. Accommodations are in a modern beachfront resort (2 nights).



Our program concludes in **HAVANA**, among the most authentic colonial cities in the Americas. At the end of the birding program, you will have an evening in Havana, one of Latin America's best preserved and most compelling colonial cities. Our last night in Havana will **include all meals, a guided city tour, including a walking tour of Habana Vieja** (Old Havana) and the 4 original plazas, declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1987, Old Havana is like a living museum, and is currently undergoing rapid, energetic change.

## THE CONSERVATION PROJECT

The U.S. Department of Treasury has provided a license for conducting bird conservation work in Cuba to the **Caribbean Conservation Trust, Inc. (CCT)**, a U.S. based organization committed to the conservation of endemic and migratory birds and their habitats in the greater Caribbean region. The primary objective of CCT is to enhance the ability of North American and Caribbean ornithologists, naturalists, resource managers, conservation organizations, institutions, and local citizens to conduct research and initiate programs to help

conserve the birds of the Caribbean and their habitats. CCT is dedicated to bird and habitat conservation through education and relationship building and, is in compliance with U.S. Treasury licensure for travel to Cuba.

For a glimpse of our program in action, go to: <http://video.pbs.org/program/counting-birds/> for a link to the film **COUNTING ON BIRDS**, a 2013 Public Broadcasting System ([www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org)) production which describes the history of the Christmas Bird Count and features a segment on our program in Cuba as an example how birders can contribute to 'citizen science' based bird conservation efforts.



*Cuban Pygmy Owl*

### **Program Leadership**

Our program is designed and managed in the United States and is professionally staffed and field tested over 20 years in Cuba. We are dedicated to providing participants with informative nature oriented experiences with the help of our highly skilled local leaders.

**Full-time U.S. Field Leader - Michael Good** has been involved with our Cuba programs since 2002, and is our U.S. leader for this program. Michael has over 25 years experience studying the birds of North America, and brings a wealth of knowledge and passion for neotropical migrants and the avifauna of the Eastern United States. Michael has traveled extensively in the US, Alaska, Europe, Australia, South America and Cuba. As a Registered Maine Guide, he has been guiding professionally for many years, focusing on avian ecology in the Gulf of Maine bioregion. Fields of expertise include wetland ecology, ornithology, environmental education and developmental biology. Michael spent many years studying numerous aspects of the Gulf of Maine while employed at the Marine Biological Laboratory and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. He currently holds a BA (Biology) from Earlham College and a MS (Developmental Biology) from the University of Utrecht, the Netherlands. In his spare time he maintains Three Pines Bird Sanctuary in Town Hill, Maine, studying micro-habitat utilized by neotropical migratory birds on Mount Desert Island, Maine and winter ecology in various Neo-tropical countries when given the opportunity. Michael was recently selected as Maine's Best Birding Guide by Yankee Magazine. He is an outstanding ornithologist and naturalist, and is President of Down East Nature Tours in Bar Harbor, Maine and is the founder of the Acadia Birding Festival.

**Full-time Cuban Field Leader - Dr. Luis Diaz** is Curator of Herpetology at Cuba's National Museum of Natural History in Havana. Luis has authored Cuba's most comprehensive book on reptiles, and has several ornithological publications to his credit. He is an excellent general naturalist and is a very talented birder and illustrator. Luis is fluent in English, and has a warm, engaging personality. Luis has been involved with research projects throughout the West Indies, and has traveled on a scientific visa to the U.S. on several occasions. Luis will be with us throughout the program in the field and will provide an overview of Cuban natural history as well as specific information relative to birds and other fauna, flora, geology and other natural features of the environments we visit. Luis will be with us throughout the program in the field. Additionally, we will work with local naturalists from the national parks and biosphere reserves that we visit throughout the program.

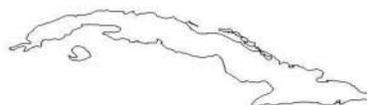
**A Bilingual Cuban Guide** will be at our service throughout the program. Along with a professional driver, he or she will be with the group each day to tell us about Cuban history, culture, arts and lifestyle. He/she will also deal with logistics, meals, translation, and other nuts-and-bolts aspects of the travel experience.

### **Accommodations**

Accommodations feature hotels in Havana and 4 additional provinces. Our Cuban accommodations are staffed by friendly hosts and in the countryside represent the best Cuba has to offer in the regions we visit. These may include refurbished vintage hotels, modern resort hotels, and simple beach-front bungalows. All accommodations are safe, clean, air conditioned tourist facilities. It should be noted that standards in Cuba differ from those in the U.S. and other developed countries.

### **Additional Details**

Following program registration, we will provide all participants with a bird list as well as details with regard to travel to Cuba, including all of the basics you need to know about travel documents, customs, facts about Cuba, currency, health and safety, food, flights, and what to bring. U.S. Government authorization documents and bird checklist will be provided following receipt of your final balance.



## Physical Demands and Expectations

This program offers opportunities for several days of ambitious birding, early departure times on birding days, and occasional evening sessions. Birding days may provide leisure time after lunch and before our afternoon birding sessions. Physical exertion will be light to moderate most days, with the longest walks approximately 3 miles. Terrain is mostly flat and dry, with some hills present in western Cuba. Participants should be in reasonably good physical condition and prepared for strong sun, with temperatures in the mid 70s – 90s. Mosquitoes can be bothersome in Cayo Coco and the Zapata Region. Although unlikely, rain may occur as well, so bring adequate rain gear. Those with medical concerns should check with their physician before taking part in the program. Your health and well-being are very important to us!



*Fernandina's Flicker*

## Registration, Trip Costs, Terms, and Conditions

Land costs for the **9 day** program are \$ **3,995.00** per person for shared accommodations, with an additional \$ **450.00** for Single supplements. The 3 day Cayo Coco extension costs \$ **685.00** plus \$ **125.00** per single supplement. Reservation forms are accepted on a first come, first served basis, and must be accompanied by a \$ **700.00 deposit** payable to **Caribbean Conservation Trust**. Enrollment is limited to 14 travelers. **CCT Cuba** programs have sold out quickly the last several seasons. Fewer participants may result in a reasonable small group supplement. With a total of 12 participants, add \$ 250.00 per person for a small group supplement.

## What is included:

CCT Cuba Bird Survey Programs include the following: all accommodations, all meals in Cuba beginning with dinner on day 1, ending with breakfast on the last day of the program, guide services, most tips (guides, drivers, naturalists and restaurant and bell staff), airport/hotel transfers, ground transportation, bottled water, some drinks, admission fees (itinerary only), U.S. Department of Treasury authorization documents, and program management services which include the provision of all pre- and post-program materials, a full-time Cuban bilingual guide, bilingual Cuban naturalists, and a fulltime driver. Program fees help support Caribbean Conservation Trust's bird conservation efforts in Cuba.



*Great Lizard Cuckoo*

## Not Included:

Travel to Havana, Cuba; Cuban Visa (\$75 - \$ 25) and Cuban health insurance (required by law and approximately \$3 per day); items of a personal nature such as laundry, phone calls, additional beverages, bar and housekeeping tips, etc., airport departure taxes (\$ 30 departing Cuba), U.S. passport fees, meals or accommodations in Miami or Cancun other fees not listed in the program. Cost estimates are as of March, 2016 and are subject to change.

## Flights

We fly from either Cancun or Miami to Havana. Flight schedules for are currently unknown at the time of publication, 10 months prior to departure. We will provide all of the information necessary to make booking these flights simple & secure. Flight costs range from \$ 450.00 - \$ 575.00 round trip. Flight plans will be announced in June of 2016.



Habana Vieja (Old Havana), Cuba

## Caribbean Conservation Trust Cuba Bird Survey – 20 Years and Counting!

### Birding Cuba since 1996

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## **CUBA BIRD SURVEY - ITINERARY**

### **Wild Western Peninsula, Western Mountains, Zapata Peninsula, Northern Archipelago and Colonial Havana**

**November 6 – 14/17, 2016**

#### **Day 1 ~ November 6, 2016**

arrive **Havana**, transfer to **Sierra de la Rosario Biosphere Reserve**

Depart Cancun or Miami, with arrival in **Havana**, Cuba. After arrival we will visit the home and private ornithological collection of **Orlando Garrido**, Cuba's greatest living naturalist. Sr. Garrido is a retired and venerable former Curator of Birds at the National Museum of Natural History in Havana, and co-author of the Field Guide to the Birds of Cuba as well as hundreds of scientific publications. This visit is often mentioned as a trip highlight. Lodging, dinner in Havana.

#### **Day 2 ~ November 7, 2016**

**Moka to Peninsula Guanahacabibes**

Breakfast and depart west for **Guanahacabibes National Park** (5 hours). The peninsula is at the far western tip of Cuba, and is among the last remaining wild places in the Caribbean. This region includes a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, and is home to 44 percent of endemic species and 47 percent of all bird species in Cuba. This area is also known for its pristine coral reefs and coastal habitat. Endemic birds such as the *Cuban Bullfinch*, *Cuban Grassquit*, *Cuban Vireo*, *Cuba Trogon*, *Cuban Tody*, and a range of other endemic and regional endemic birds are likely here. Dinner, accommodation at the beachfront **Hotel Maria la Gorda** (2 nights).



*Cuban Grassquit*

#### **Day 3 ~ November 8, 2016**

**Guanahacabibes National Park**

Breakfast and birding nearby the hotel in restricted conservation areas. Endemics such as the *Bee Hummingbird* (world's smallest bird), *Cuban Black Hawk*, *Cuban Tody*, *Cuban Green Woodpecker*, *Yellow-headed Warbler*, in addition to numerous neo-tropical migrants and West Indian and Caribbean residents, including *Cuban Crow*, *Cuban Parrot* and Plain Pigeon are likely. Birding areas include coastal scrub & low to moderate growth forest. Terrain is mostly flat & dry, with forest trail and roadside birding. Dinner/accommodation overlooking the beach at **Hotel Maria la Gorda**.

#### **Day 4 ~ November 9, 2016**

**Guanahacabibes to San Diego de los Banos**

Morning birding options on the peninsula, followed by lunch and departure east to **San Diego de los Banos** (3 + hours). Dinner and accommodation at **Hotel Mirador**, nestled in the quiet town of San Diego de los Banos in the foothills surrounding nearby **La Guira National Park**. Dinner, accommodation at **Hotel Mirador** (1 night).

#### **Day 5 ~ November 10, 2016**

**San Diego de los Banos – Zapata Peninsula**

Morning birding local to **La Guira National Park** (slightly hilly, easy forest trails, 2+ miles) including Cueva de Portales carved by the San Diego River, which currently meanders through. This was Che Guevara's military headquarters during the missile crisis of 1962. The endemic *Cuban Solitaire*, *Cuban Oriole*, *Cuban Pygmy-Owl*, well as *Giant Kingbird*, Cuban Pewee, Great Lizard Cuckoo, Red-legged Honeycreeper, and *Red-legged Thrush* (endemic subspecies).

We may also visit **Hacienda Cortina**, an interesting former lavish estate surrounded by mixed forest. Lunch followed by departure east to the Zapata Peninsula (4+ hours). Birding stops along the way as opportunity permits. Accommodation and dinner in **Playa Larga** (3 nights) on the picturesque **Bay of Pigs**, in tourist board approved private houses, allowing an opportunity to interact with local Cubans who have lived in this interesting area their entire lives.

#### **Day 6 ~ November 11, 2016**

**Zapata Peninsula**

Breakfast and departure for birding within **Zapata National Park**. This region contains the largest wetland complex in the West Indies, and is Cuba's most prolific birding region. Here we have access to excellent local guides, as well as to protected areas and birding locations off the beaten track. Our morning of birding is in a nature preserve adjacent to the small village of **Bermejas**. Here is we have opportunities to see the endemic *Fernandina's Flicker*, *Bare-legged Owl*, *Cuban Parakeet*, Cuban Parrot, *Blue-headed* and *Gray-fronted Quail-Doves*, as well as Key West and Ruddy Quail Doves. Lunch at Caleta Buena, a beautiful limestone rimmed inlet abundant with fish and excellent snorkeling opportunities. The historic Bay of Pigs museum is nearby. Afternoon birding session as well.

Cuban Parrots, Zapata National Park



**Day 7 ~ November 12, 2016**

**Zapata Peninsula**

An early breakfast and a morning walk along a dry roadway in the swamp at **La Turba** and good opportunity for *Zapata Wren*, *Zapata Sparrow*, *Red-shouldered Blackbird* and Tawny-shouldered Blackbird and a variety of warblers and other migrants. Parts of this area are reminiscent of the Everglades. Lunch followed by a mid-day break. Late afternoon visit to **Las Salinas Wildlife Refuge**, with numerous shorebirds, Reddish Egrets, Wood Storks, Spoonbills, Flamingos and endemic *Cuban Black-Hawk*. All walking is on dry, flat terrain (less than 2 miles total). Evening attempts to find Stygian Owl and/or the endemic Cuban Nightjar.

**Day 8 November 13, 2016**

**Zapata to Havana**

Breakfast, check out, and departure for Havana (2+ hours). We include lunch, and a guided walking tour of Old Havana, one of the jewels of colonial America. Accommodation in Havana. Farewell dinner overlooking the city and sea.

**Day 9 November 14, 2015**

**Havana**

– **Miami** Breakfast and checkout with transfer to the airport for the 1 hour flight to Miami or Cancun.

**\*CAYO COCO EXTENSION OPTION (3 additional days)**

**Day 8~ November 13, 2016**

**Zapata to Cayo Coco**

Breakfast, check out and departure north east to Cayo Coco on Cuba's Atlantic shore. The Cuban archipelago is the setting for Hemingway's *Islands in the Stream*. The 'keys' offer excellent birding, scenery, and accommodation. All inclusive beachfront accommodation and meals in **Cayo Coco**. Birding en route on the mainland and islands.

**Day 9 ~ November 14, 2016**

**Cayo Coco**



Morning birding on **Cayo Paredon Grande**, the northeastern-most key in the Cayo Coco archipelago, which is one of Cuba's most important migratory landfalls. *Oriente Warbler*, *Cuban Gnatcatcher*, Thick-billed Vireo, *Zapata Sparrow*, the endangered Bahama Mockingbird and West Indian Whistling Duck are target birds for the day. Lunch at the hotel followed by afternoon birding on **Cayo Guillermo** amidst mangrove flats, low coastal scrub, and pristine white sand shoreline (roadside, flat

*Oriente Warbler* walking). Dinner, accommodation in Cayo Coco.

**Day 10 ~ November 15, 2016**

**Cayo Coco to Santa Clara**

AM birding trek (leader discretion). Late check out followed by lunch in Cayo Coco and drive to **Santa Clara** (4 + hours) for accommodation and dinner at La Granjita (1 night), in the countryside outside of town. Birding stops along the way.

**Day 11 ~ November 16, 2016**

**Sancti Spiritus – Havana**

Breakfast, departure west towards Havana (3+ hours) .We include lunch, and a guided walking tour of Old Havana, one of the jewels of colonial America. Accommodation in Havana. Farewell dinner overlooking the city and sea.

**Day 12 ~ November 17, 2016**

**Havana – Miami or Cancun**

Breakfast, checkout and transfer to the airport for one hour flight to Miami or Cancun.